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ABSTRACT

This brief overview is intended for educators concerned with the realities of implementation and techniques for operational success in open classroom education. Presented are enumerations of statements on 1) essential environmental components that exist in a successful classroom in which the childs' needs, intellectual, and social abilities are the focus of education; 2) roles of teachers; and 3) responsibilities of teachers. Criteria provided for teacher success in an open classroom are that competent teachers demonstrate achievement in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; are committed and involved; and maintain positive attitudes about children, learning, and knowledge. An explanation of Barths' dissertation, "Assumptions About Learning and Knowledge", a teacher attitude scale dealing with teachers' beliefs about childrens' learning behaviors, is included. In an open environment children are expected to develop a number of listed measurable skills enabling teachers to evaluate each students' development. Several statements are given on prevalent misconceptions about open education. It is concluded that successful implementation of open classroom methods is a unique gradual process and has no predictive time: success occurs with smoothness of procedure and evidence of learning and growth. (Author/SJM)

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A BRIEF OVERVIEW

OF

OPEN CLASSROOM EDUCATION

1972

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A STATEMENT ON OPEN CLASSROOM EDUCATION, 1972

The 1972 image of Open Classroom Education suggests movement beyond the awareness level of the educational, psychological, and philosophical foundations. American educatexs who have been exposed to a plethara of new literature on open education coupled with the essential related concepts of John Dewey, Susan Isaacs and Jean Piaget are now concerned with the realities of implementation and the techniques for operational success.

What are some of the manifestations of success? I present for your consideration a statement of the essential components present in an operationally successful open classroom in which the child's needs and the child's intellectual and social abilities are the focus of education:

a. A welcoming environment.

b. A prepared enviornment inviting exploration and investigation.

c. A wide variety of choices available within an organic curriculum.

d. An environment in which the interrelatedness of the disciplines is explored.

e. An environment accommodating different learning styles.

f. An environment in which risk taking is encouraged as a natural process in the learner's growth.

g. An environment in which there is opportunity to demonstrate strengths and develop weaknesses into strengths.

h. An environment where peer teaching and learner sharing are encouraged in the learning modes.

i. An environment where the learner is an active participant in the learning process.

j. An environment in which the uniqueness of each learner is respected and nurtured.

k. An environment which nurtures cognitive, affective and psychomotor growth.

l. An environment in which is demonstrated an appreciation of the beauty which is inherent in all the disciplines and in learning itself.

m. An environment in which curiosity is encouraged.

n. An environment in which students and teachers are partners as they seek knowledge and understanding.

o. An environment which nurtures self-esteem and self-awareness.

p. An environment which cooperation is used to develop a sense of community.

q. An environment where trust and mutual respect is basic among all members of the classroom community.

To effect success, it is essential that the teacher take an active part in the total gestalt of the environment.

What is the role of a teacher in these classrooms? New roles are assumed by the effective Open Classroom teacher which require competency in new teacher skills. A successful environment results when the teacher can function as below:

(1) A cooperative facilitator.

(2) A sympathetic supporter.

(3) A knowledgeable resource person.

(4) A knowledgeable diagnostician.

(5) An available and knowledgeable aid in the childs pursuit of knowledge.

The process of developing competence in these new roles will be facilitated as the teacher fulfills some operational responsibilities which will result in the presence of the components essential for successful implementation.

Responsibilities of Teachers in an Open Classroom Environment

1. To create an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect between adults and children and among the children.

2. To provide a cognitively rich environment through well prepared related learning centers (science, mathematics, language reading, arts, music, arts, and crafts, etc.).

3. To provide an environment free from:

   a. artificial grades (non-graded in the true sense, i.e., each child working at his own speed in his own area of interest, not necessarily paralleling any other child's curriculum.).

   b. inhibiting time restrictions (no bells which interrupt completion of a task for the sake of some artificial routine).

   c. negative competition (removal of grades and other forms of critical comparison of one child's work against another's; rather, create an environment in which an internal competition (self improvement to realize the rewards of one's own success) is nurtured).

4. To be supportive of each child's potential by cooperatively planning tasks with him, setting realistic goals that can be successfully completed within a determined period of time.

5. To create a non-punitive environment in which risks are taken since erring is viewed as an essential part of growth. Self-identification of an error becomes a self-motivating corrective factor in the learning process.

6. To provide a model by learning, exploring and inquiring along with the children as new challenges are presented to the teacher.

7. To provide a setting in which (the teacher) can be comfortable. As one member of the classroom community, the teacher too should have the opportunity to function effectively.

8. To facilitate rather than disseminate learning. The child's learning, not the adult's teaching, should be the focus of effort.

9. To create a sense of community, nurturing the positive attributes of each class member, each child's unique characteristics joined together contribute to the total class.

10. To create an environment where free exchange of ideas is encouraged.

11. To provide opportunities for decision-making independent of adult supervision.

12. To provide opportunities for the development of self-assessment skills.

<u>What are some criteria for teacher success in an open classroom</u>? It would be unrealistic to suggest that all teachers could function successfully in any teaching methodology. For each method of teaching, specific teacher characteristics

are essential for success. Essential to successful implementation in an open classroom in addition to cognitive skills is teacher comfort with the new roles and demands imposed on him/her by a system of teaching which requires intense teacher committment and involvement.

When we approach the problem of teacher selection we might first assess how the teacher perceives the child in his relationship to his own learnings, and how the teacher perceives knowledge and its relationship to the child's learning.

In Roland Barth's dissertation on open education, we find a section on fundamental "Assumptions about Learning and Knowledge." Mr. Barth has prepared a list of statements to which the reader responds. The nature of the response will reflect the readers' values on children's learning and knowledge. Patterns of responses seem to indicate expectations for potential success as an open classroom teacher.

I have included a reprint of these assumptions for the reader to use and assess his own potential success:

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE[1]

Consider the following statements and examine your own reactions to them. Your reactions may reveal salient attitudes about children, learning, and knowledge. Where do you stand?

Draw a circle around SA, A, NSF, D, or SD to indicate which best represents your own feelings about each statement.

SA: Strongly agree
A: Agree
NSF: No Strong Feeling
D: Disagree
SD: Strongly Disagree

1. Children are innately curious and will explore their environment without adutl intervention. SA A NSF D SD

2. Exploratory behavior is self-perpetuating. SA A NSF D SD

3.	The child will display natural exploratory behavior if he is not threatened.	SA A NSF D SD
4.	Confidence in self is highly related to capacity for learning and for making important choices affecting one's learning.	SA A NSF D SD
5.	Active exploration in a rich environment, offering a wide array of manipulative materials, will facilitate children's learning.	SA A NSF D SD
6.	Play is not distinguished from work as the predominant mode of learning in early childhood.	SA A NSF D SD
7.	Children have both the competence and the right to make significant decisions concerning their own learning.	SA A NSF D SD
8.	Children will be likely to learn if they are given considerable choice in the selection of the materials they wish to work with and in the choice of questions they wish to pursue with respect to those materials.	SA A NSF D SD
9.	Given the opportunity, children will choose to engage in activities which will be of high interest to them.	SA A NSF D SD
10.	If a child is fully involved in and is having fun with an activity, learning is taking place.	SA A NSF D SD
11.	When two or more children are interested in exploring the same problem or the same materials, they will often choose to collaborate in some way.	SA A NSF D SD
12.	When a child learns something which is important to him, he will wish to share it with others.	SA A NSF D SD
13.	Concept formation proceeds very slowly.	SA A NSF D SD
14.	Children learn and develop intellectually not only at their own rate but in their own style.	SA A NSF D SD
15.	Children pass through similar stages of intellectual development, each in his own way and at his own rate and in his own time.	SA A NSF D SD
16.	Intellectual growth and development take place through a sequence of concrete experiences followed by abstractions.	SA A NSF D SD
17.	Verbal abstractions should follow direct experience with objects and ideas, not precede them or substitute for them.	SA A NSF D SD
18.	The preferred source of verification for a child's solution to a problem comes through the materials he is working with.	SA A NSF D SD

19. Errors are necessarily a part of the learning process; they are to be expected and even desired, for they contain information essential to further learning. SA A NSF D SD

20. Those qualities of a person's learning which can be carefully measured are not necessarily the most important. SA A NSF D SD

21. Objective measures of performance may have a negative effect upon learning. SA A NSF D SD

22. Learning is best assessed intuitively, by direct observation. SA A NSF D SD

23. The best way of evaluating the effect of the school experience on the child is to observe him over a long period of time SA A NSF D SD

24. The best measure of a child's work is his work. SA A NSF D SD

25. The quality of being is more important than the quality of knowing; knowledge is a means of education, not its end. The final test of an education is what a man "is", not what he "knows." SA A NSF D SD

26. Knowledge is a function of one's personal integration of experience and therefore does not fall into neatly separate categories or "disciplines." SA A NSF D SD

27. The structure of knowledge is personal idiosyncratic; it is a function of the synthesis of each individual's experience with the world. SA A NSF D SD

28. Little or no knowledge exists which it is essential for everyone to acquire. SA A NSF D SD

29. It is possible, even likely, that an individual may learn and possess knowledge of a phenomenon and yet be unable to display it publicly. Knowledge resides with the knower, not in its public expression. SA A NSF D SD

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[1]From Roland S. Barth, "Open Education," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Educatinn, 1970. Reported in "Phi Delta Kappan," October 1971, pp. 97-99.

Most successful open classroom teachers generally respond in the "strongly agree" category of the continuum for most of the statements included in the instrument. If the reader responds in a similar manner, however, this does not

assure success. If, however, the reader's response is consistently in the strongly disagree category, this pattern is probably predictive of an inability to function successfully in an open environment.

A second consideration in the problem of teacher selection is the matter of teachers competencies that are essential for successful implementation. The writer is suggesting as part of her dissertation study that if teachers can demonstrate achievement of specific competencies in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, they will have the essential tools necessary for successful open classroom teaching.

The participants involved in this study are at present working with the writer in a University Open Classroom environment in which competencies are being developed and assessed. Some of the participants are teachers in the process of implementing their own open classroom and can provide the necessary feedback concerning the development of these competencies and their relationship to effective classroom implementation.

Since we are at the beginning stage of assessing the feedback on the achievement of the competencies defined in the study, I have not included the list in this overview. However, I would be happy to share some data on our results thus far and will provide more concrete information upon request as the study nears completion.

What are the expectations for a child in an operationally successful open classroom? The teacher should be able to assess development in the following areas:

1. Problem-solving skills.
2. Symbolic skills.
3. Manipulative skills.
4. Information gathering and identification of appropriate use.
5. Self-motivated learning skills.

6. Critical self-evaluation.
7. Social-skills.
8. Creative potential.
9. Identifying a comfortable and rewarding learning style.
10. Sensitivity to beauty, man-made or natural.
11. Self-esteem.
12. Sense of responsibility to oneself and to the class.
13. Decision making.

When can successful implementation be realized? Successful implementation of open classroom methods is a gradual process. The process has periods of frustration and doubt as well as rewards and security. The process requires that a teacher look at unsuccessful and successful efforts as a part of growth. Because each classroom is unique, there is no predictive time by which a teacher should expect successful implementation. The process is organic and as teacher competencies are developed, successes become cumulative. As classroom procedures become more consistent and the definition of roles and goals clarified, the teacher will begin to observe a smoothness of procedure and concrete evidences of learning and growth. At this point the teacher can begin to identify successful implementation.

What are some common misondeptions? Because of the origins of open education and the non-conventional manner in which it is developing in some areas of this country (ie. free schools) many misconceptions are associated with its operational methodology. I should like to conclude with some thoughts on common misconceptions:

1. Open education is structured in a fashion different from traditional structure.
2. Open education is an orderly though dynamic mode of learning.
3. Open education can be self-directed learning, teacher-student planned learning and teacher-directed learning.
4. Open education is small group learning, individualized learning and large group learning.
5. Open education is goal and achievement oriented (goals and achievements to be determined cooperatively by the child and teacher).

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